

2013 - 2014 Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent

Approved

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62	1	A	1

Budget Action Title: Police: Determining the appropriate size of the police force

Councilmembers: Clark; Conlin; Harrell; Licata

Staff Analyst: Peter Harris

Budget Committee Vote:

Date	Result	SB	BH	TR	RC	TB	NL	JG	SC	MO
11/07/2012	Pass 8- 1-Absent	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Statement of Legislative Intent:

In approving the budget for the Police Department, it is the Council's intent to develop a more complete basis for determining the appropriate size of the police force.

The Council recognizes that there is unlikely to be a good and complete answer to this question that is readily available. Therefore the best approach may be a phased approach, in which the City reviews the sworn staffing requirements for major police functions in light of the major outcomes desired of the police.

Accordingly the Council requests that the Police Department, Executive and Council staff jointly develop a scope for analyzing the sworn staffing requirements for major police functions. This may begin with a review of the Neighborhood Policing Plan for patrol, and then proceed sequentially to other major functions such as crime investigations and traffic enforcement.

Background

Resolution 30930, adopted in 2006, stated the Council's desire to determine the number of officers and other Police Department resources that will reasonably enhance public safety, and asked the Mayor to recommend the appropriate number of police officers for 2008 through 2012. In response, the Department and the Mayor proposed the Neighborhood Policing Plan, which the Council endorsed in 2007.

The Neighborhood Policing Plan focused on the number of officers assigned to patrol. It called for 605 officers to be assigned to 911 response in the five precincts, based on an analysis of the number of officers that would be required to meet response time goals and also have enough time when not responding to calls to proactively address crime problems in their beats. Subsequent analysis suggested that alternative shift structures could reduce this minimum to approximately 580 officers. This plan is an example of a workload-based assessment of patrol needs, recently recommended by

the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services as the preferred method for determining the number of patrol officers.

Patrol, however, comprises only about half of the sworn force. Other major Police Department functions include crime investigations, homeland security, gang interdiction, special weapons and tactical response, and traffic enforcement. In addition there are a variety of support functions staffed at least in part by officers. In total, the Department's list of functional priorities includes 17 direct sworn mission functions, 10 sworn and civilian mission support functions, and seven sworn and civilian supplemental services. As yet there is no comprehensive workload-based or benchmarked assessment of the appropriate level of sworn staffing in these functions.

Further, there have been many innovations in policing in the last few decades, and all signs are that the pace of innovation will continue. Almost ten years ago a committee of the National Research Council concluded that the standard policing model, consisting largely of random patrol, fast responses to 911 calls and follow-up investigations, has little effect on crime. A wide variety of alternative and sometimes overlapping strategies and tactics have been developed, variously labeled problem-oriented policing, COMPSTAT, place-based or hot spot policing, focused deterrence, and the like. A growing body of research suggests that many of these techniques can have powerful effects on crime, but results have varied across different implementations of similar techniques, and research and refinements continue.

In the meantime, expectations are rising. Due in part to significant reductions in crime apparently resulting at least in part from improvements in policing, citizens in large cities are no longer accepting high crime rates as a given.

All these suggest that a reconsideration of the appropriate size of the Seattle police force is in order. The Council sought to do part of this in 2012, with a Statement of Legislative Intent calling for an update to the Neighborhood Policing Plan. By agreement of the Council and Executive midyear, this work was postponed due to continued uncertainty about the City's budget situation and consequent uncertainty about the number of officers the Department would be able to assign to patrol.

Response: First written scoping report to Public Safety, Civil Rights & Technology Committee on or before March 29, 2013

Responsible Council Committee(s): Public Safety, Civil Rights and Technology

Date Due to Council: March 29, 2013